

MICHAEL OAKESHOTT

London School of Economics

THE MASSES IN REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRACY

I

The course of modern European history has thrown up a character whom we are accustomed to call the 'mass man'. His appearance is spoken of as the most significant and far-reaching of all the revolutions of modern times. He is credited with having transformed our way of living, our standards of conduct and our manners of political activity. He is, sometimes regretfully, acknowledged to have become the arbiter of taste, the dictator of policy, the uncrowned king of the modern world. He excites fear in some, admiration in others, wonder in all. His numbers have made him a giant; he proliferates everywhere; he is recognized either as a locust who is making a desert of what was once a fertile garden, or as the bearer of a new and more glorious civilization.

All this I believe to be a gross exaggeration. And I think we should recognize what our true situation is in this respect, what precisely we owe to this character, and the extent of his impact, if we understood more clearly who this 'mass man' is and where he has come from. And with a view to answering these questions, I propose to engage in a piece of historical description.

It is a long story, which has too often been made unintelligible by being abridged. It does not begin (as some would have us understand) with the French Revolution or with the industrial changes of the late eighteenth century; it begins in those perplexing centuries which, because of their illegibility, no historian can decide whether they should properly be regarded as a conclusion or a preface, namely the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. And it begins, not with the emergence of the 'mass man', but with an emergence of a very different kind, namely, that of the human individual in his modern

idiom. You must bear with me while I set the scene for the entry of the character we are to study, because we shall mistake him unless we prepare ourselves for his appearance.

II

There have been occasions, some of them in the distant past, when, usually as a consequence of the collapse of a closely integrated manner of living, human individuality has emerged and has been enjoyed for a time. An emergence of this sort is always of supreme importance; it is the modification not only of all current activities, but also of all human relationships from those of husband, wife and children to those of ruler and subject. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in western Europe were an occasion of this kind. What began to emerge, then, was conditions so pre-eminently favourable to a very high degree of human individuality, and human beings enjoying (to such a degree and in such numbers) the experience of 'self-determination' in conduct and belief, that it overshadows all earlier occasions of the sort. Nowhere else has the emergence of individuals (that is, persons accustomed to making choices for themselves) either modified human relationships so profoundly, or proved so durable an experience, or provoked so strong a reaction, or explained itself so elaborately in the idiom of philosophical theory.

Like everything else in modern Europe, achievement in respect of human individuality was a modification of medieval conditions of life or thought. It was not generated in claims and assertions on behalf of individuality, but in sporadic divergencies from a condition of human circumstance in which the opportunity for choice was narrowly circumscribed. To know oneself as the member of a family, a group, a corporation, a church, a village community, as the suitor at a court or as the occupier of a tenancy, had been, for the vast majority, the circumstantially possible sum of self-knowledge. Not only were ordinary activities, those concerned with getting a living, communal in character, but so also were decisions, rights and responsibilities. Relationships and allegiances normally sprang from status and rarely extricated themselves from the analogy of kinship. For the most part anonymity prevailed; individual human character

was rarely observed because it was not there to be observed. What differentiated one man from another was insignificant when compared with what was enjoyed in common as members of a group of some sort.

This situation reached something of a climax in the twelfth century. It was modified slowly, sporadically and intermittently over a period of about seven centuries, from the thirteenth to the twentieth century. The change began earlier and went more rapidly in some parts of Europe than in others; it penetrated some activities more readily and more profoundly than others; it affected men before it touched women; and during these seven centuries there have been many local climaxes and corresponding recessions. But the enjoyment of the new opportunities of escape from communal ties gradually generated a new idiom of human character.

It emerged first in Italy: Italy was the first home of the modern individual who sprang from the break-up of medieval communal life. 'At the close of the thirteenth century', writes Burckhardt, 'Italy began to swarm with individuality; the ban laid upon human personality was dissolved; a thousand figures meet us, each in his own special shape and dress'. The *uomo singolare*, whose conduct was marked by a high degree of self-determination and a large number of whose activities expressed personal preferences, gradually detached himself from his fellows. And together with him appeared, not only the *libertine* and the *dilettante*, but also the *uomo unico*, the man who, in the mastery of his circumstances, stood alone and was a law to himself. Men examined themselves and were not dismayed by their own want of perfection. This was the character which Petrarch dramatized for his generation with unmatched skill and unrivalled energy. A new image of human nature appeared – not Adam, not Prometheus, but Proteus – a character distinguished from all others on account of his multiplicity and of his endless power of self-transformation.

North of the Alps, events took a similar course, though they moved more slowly and had to contend with larger hindrances. In England, in France, in the Netherlands, in Spain, in Switzerland, in Poland, Hungary and Bohemia, and particularly in all centres of municipal life, conditions favourable to individuality, and individuals to exploit

them, appeared. There were few fields of activity untouched. By the middle of the sixteenth century they had been so firmly established that they were beyond the range of mere suppression: not all the severity of the Calvinist *régime* in Geneva was sufficient to quell the impulse to think and behave as an independent individual. The disposition to regard a high degree of individuality in conduct and in belief as the condition proper to mankind and as the main ingredient of human 'happiness', had become one of the significant dispositions of modern European character. What Petrarch did for one century, Montaigne did for another.

The story of the vicissitudes of this disposition during the last four centuries is exceedingly complex. It is a story, not of steady growth, but of climaxes and anti-climaxes, of diffusion to parts of Europe at first relatively ignorant of it, of extension to activities from which it was at first excluded, of attack and defence, of confidence and of apprehension. But, if we cannot pursue it in all its detail, we may at least observe how profoundly this disposition imposed itself upon European conduct and belief. In the course of a few hundred years, it was magnified into an ethical and even into a metaphysical theory, it gathered to itself an appropriate understanding of the office of government, it modified political manners and institutions, it settled itself upon art, upon religion, upon industry and trade and upon every kind of human relationship.

In the field of intellectual speculation the clearest reflection of this profound experience of individuality is to be seen in ethical theory. Almost all modern writing about moral conduct begins with the hypothesis of an individual human being choosing and pursuing his own directions of activity. What appeared to require explanation was not the existence of such individuals, but how they could come to have duties to others of their kind and what was the nature of those duties; just as the existence of other minds became a problem to those who understood knowledge as the residue of sense experience. This is unmistakable in Hobbes, the first moralist of the modern world to take candid account of the current experience of individuality. He understood a man as an organism governed by an impulse to avoid destruction and to maintain itself in its own characteristic and chosen pursuits. Each individual has a natural right to inde-

pendent existence: the only problem is how he is to pursue his own chosen course with the greatest measure of success, the problem of his relation to 'others' of his kind. And a similar view of things appeared, of course, in the writings of Spinoza. But even where an individualistic conclusion was rejected, this autonomous individual remained as the starting point of ethical reflection. Every moralist in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is concerned with the psychological structure of this assumed 'individual': the relation of 'self' and 'others' is the common form of all moral theory of the time. And nowhere is this seen more clearly to be the case than in the writings of Kant. Every human being, in virtue of not being subject to natural necessity, is recognized by Kant to be a Person, an end in himself, absolute and autonomous. To seek his own happiness is the natural pursuit of such a person; self-love is the motive of the choices which compose his conduct. But as a rational human being he will recognize in his conduct the universal conditions of autonomous personality; and the chief of these conditions is to use humanity, as well in himself as in others, as an end and never as a means. Morality consists in the recognition of individual personality whenever it appears. Moreover, personality is so far sacrosanct that no man has either a right or a duty to promote the moral perfection of another: we may promote the 'happiness' of others, but we cannot promote their 'good' without destroying their 'freedom' which is the condition of moral goodness.

In short, whatever we may think of the moral theories of modern Europe, they provide the clearest evidence of the overwhelming impact of this experience of individuality.

But this pursuit of individuality, and of the conditions most favourable to its enjoyment, was reflected also in an understanding of the proper office of government and in appropriate manners of governing and being governed, both modifications of an inheritance from the Middle Ages. We have time only to notice them in their most unqualified appearance, namely, in what we have come to call 'modern representative democracy'. This manner of governing and being governed appeared first in England, in the Netherlands and in Switzerland, and was later (in various idioms) extended to other parts of Western Europe and the United States of America. It is

not to be understood either as an approximation to some ideal manner of government, or as a modification of a manner of government (with which it has no connection whatever) current for a short while in certain parts of the ancient world. It is simply what emerged in Western Europe where the impact of the aspirations of individuality upon medieval institutions of government was greatest.

The first demand of those intent upon exploring the intimations of individuality was for an instrument of government capable of transforming the interests of individuality into rights and duties. To perform this task government required three attributes. First, it must be single and supreme; only by a concentration of all authority at one centre could the emergent individual escape from the communal pressures of family and guild, of church and local community, which hindered his enjoyment of his own character. Secondly, it must be an instrument of government not bound by prescription and therefore with authority to abolish old rights and create new: it must be a 'sovereign' government. And this, according to current ideas, meant a government in which all who enjoyed rights were partners, a government in which the 'estates' of the realm were direct or indirect participants. Thirdly, it must be powerful – able to preserve the order without which the aspirations of individuality could not be realized; but not so powerful as itself to constitute a new threat to individuality. In an earlier time, the recognized methods of transforming interests into rights had been judicial; the 'parliaments' and 'councils' of the middle ages had been pre-eminently judicial bodies. But from these 'courts of law' emerged an instrument with more emphatic authority to recognize new interests by converting them into new rights and duties; there emerged legislative bodies. Thus, a ruler, and a parliament representative of his subjects, came to share the business of 'making' law. And the law they made was favourable to the interests of individuality: it provided the detail of what became a well-understood condition of human circumstance, commonly denoted by the word 'freedom'. In this condition every subject was secured of the right to pursue his chosen directions of activity as little hindered as might be by his fellows or by the exactions of government itself, and as little distracted by communal pressures. Freedom of movement, of initiative, of speech, of belief

and religious observance, of association and disassociation, of bequest and inheritance; security of person and property; the right to choose one's own occupation and dispose of one's labour and goods; and over all the 'rule of law': the right to be ruled by a known law, applicable to all subjects alike. And these rights, appropriate to individuality, were not the privileges of a single class; they were the property of every subject alike. Each signified the abrogation of some feudal privilege.

This manner of governing, which reached its climax in the 'parliamentary' government which emerged in England and elsewhere in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was concurrently theorized in an understanding of the proper office of government. What had been a 'community' came to be recognized as an 'association' of individuals: this was the counterpart in political philosophy of the individualism that had established itself in ethical theory. And the office of government was understood to be the maintenance of arrangements favourable to the interests of individuality, arrangements (that is) which emancipated the subject from the 'chains' (as Rousseau put it) of communal allegiances, and constituted a condition of human circumstance in which the intimations of individuality might be explored and the experience of individuality enjoyed.

Briefly, then, my picture is as follows. Human individuality is an historical emergence, as 'artificial' and as 'natural' as the landscape. In modern Europe this emergence was gradual, and the specific character of the individual who emerged was determined by the manner of his generation. He became unmistakable when the habit appeared of engaging in activities identified as 'private'; indeed, the appearance of 'privacy' in human conduct is the obverse of the desuetude of the communal arrangements from which modern individuality sprang. This experience of individuality provoked a disposition to explore its own intimations, to place the highest value upon it, and to seek security in its enjoyment. To enjoy it came to be recognized as the main ingredient of 'happiness'. The experience was magnified into an ethical theory; it was reflected in manners of governing and being governed, in newly acquired rights and duties and in a whole pattern of living. The emergence of this

disposition to be an individual is the pre-eminent event in modern European history.

III

There were many modest manners in which this disposition to be an individual might express itself. Every practical enterprise and every intellectual pursuit revealed itself as an assemblage of opportunities for making choices: art, literature, philosophy, commerce-industry and politics each came to partake of this character. Never, theless, in a world being transformed by the aspirations and activities of those who were excited by these opportunities, there were some people, by circumstance or by temperament, less ready than others to respond to this invitation; and for many the invitation to make choices came before the ability to make them and was consequently recognized as a burden. The old certainties of belief, of occupation and of status were being dissolved, not only for those who had confidence in their own power to make a new place for themselves in an association of individuals, but also for those who had no such confidence. The counterpart of the agricultural and industrial *entrepreneur* of the sixteenth century was the displaced labourer; the counterpart of the *libertine* was the dispossessed believer. The familiar warmth of communal pressures was dissipated for all alike – an emancipation which excited some, depressed others. The familiar anonymity of communal life was replaced by a personal identity which was burdensome to those who could not transform it into an individuality. What some recognized as happiness, appeared to others as discomfort. The same condition of human circumstance was identified as progress and as decay. In short, the circumstances of modern Europe, even as early as the sixteenth century, bred, not a single character, but two obliquely opposed characters: not only that of the individual, but also that of the ‘individual *manqué*’. And this ‘individual *manqué*’ was not a relic of a past age; he was a ‘modern’ character, the product of the same dissolution of communal ties as had generated the modern European individual.

We need not speculate upon what combination of debility, ignorance, timidity, poverty or mischance operated in particular cases to pro-

voke this character; it is enough to observe his appearance and his efforts to accommodate himself to his hostile environment. He sought a protector who would recognize his predicament, and he found what he sought, in some measure, in 'the government'. From as early as the sixteenth century the governments of Europe were being modified, not only in response to the demands of individuality, but in response also to the needs of the 'individual *manqué*'. The 'godly prince' of the Reformation and his lineal descendant, the 'enlightened despot' of the eighteenth century, were political inventions for making choices for those indisposed to make choices for themselves; the Elizabethan Statute of Labourers was designed to take care of those who were left behind in the race.

The aspirations of individuality had imposed themselves upon conduct and belief and upon the constitutions and activities of governments, in the first place, as demands emanating from a powerful and confident disposition. There was little attempt to moralize these demands, which in the sixteenth century were clearly in conflict with current moral sentiment, still fixed in its loyalty to the morality of communal ties. Nevertheless, from the experience of individuality there sprang, in the course of time, a morality appropriate to it – a disposition not only to explore individuality but to approve of the pursuit of individuality. This constituted a considerable moral revolution; but such was its force and vigour that it not only swept aside the relics of the morality appropriate to the defunct communal order, but left little room for any alternative *to itself*. And the weight of this moral victory bore heavily upon the 'individual *manqué*'. Already outmanoeuvred in the field (in conduct), he now suffered a defeat at home, in his own character. What had been no more than a doubt about his ability to hold his own in a struggle for existence, became a radical self-distrust; what had been merely a hostile prospect, disclosed itself as an abyss; what had been the discomfort of ill-success was turned into the misery of guilt.

In some, no doubt, this situation provoked resignation; but in others it bred envy, jealousy and resentment. And in these emotions a new disposition was generated: the impulse to escape from the predicament by imposing it upon all mankind. From the frustrated 'individual *manqué*' there sprang the militant 'anti-individual', disposed

to assimilate the world to his own character by deposing the individual and destroying his moral prestige. No promise, or even offer, of self-advancement could tempt this 'anti-individual'; he knew his individuality was too poorly furnished to be explored or exploited with any satisfaction whatever. He was moved solely by the opportunity of complete escape from the anxiety of not being an individual, the opportunity of removing from the world all that convicted him of his own inadequacy. His situation provoked him to seek release in separatist communities, insulated from the moral pressure of individuality. But the opportunity he sought appeared fully when he recognized that, so far from being alone, he belonged to the most numerous class in modern European society, the class of those who had no choices of their own to make. Thus, in the recognition of his numerical superiority the 'anti-individual' at once recognized himself as the 'mass man' and discovered the way of escape from his predicament. For, although the 'mass man' is specified by his disposition – a disposition to allow in others only a replica of himself, to impose upon all a uniformity of belief and conduct that leaves no room for either the pains or the pleasures of choice – and not by his numbers, he is confirmed in this disposition by the support of others of his kind. He can have no friends (because friendship is a relation between individuals), but he has comrades. The 'masses' as they appear in modern European history are not composed of individuals; they are composed of 'anti-individuals' united in a revulsion from individuality. Consequently, although the remarkable growth of population in Western Europe during the last four hundred years is a condition of the success with which this character has imposed itself, it is not a condition of the character itself.

Nevertheless, the 'anti-individual' had feelings rather than thoughts, impulses rather than opinions, inabilities rather than passions, and was only dimly aware of his power. Consequently, he required 'leaders': indeed, the modern concept of 'leadership' is a concomitant of the 'anti-individual', and without him it would be unintelligible. An association of individuals requires a ruler, but it has no place for a 'leader'. The 'anti-individual' needed to be told what to think; his impulses had to be transformed into desires, and these desires into projects; he had to be made aware of his power; and these were

the tasks of his leaders. Indeed, from one point of view, 'the masses' must be regarded as the invention of their leaders.

The natural submissiveness of the 'mass man' may itself be supposed to have been capable of prompting the appearance of appropriate leaders. He was unmistakably an instrument to be played upon, and no doubt the instrument provoked the *virtuoso*. But there was, in fact, a character ready to occupy this office. What was required was a man who could at once appear as the image and the master of his followers; a man who could more easily make choices for others than for himself; a man disposed to mind other people's business because he lacked the skill to find satisfaction in minding his own. And these, precisely, were the attributes of the 'individual *manqué*', whose achievements and whose failures in respect of individuality exactly fitted him for this task of leadership. He was enough of an individual to seek a personal satisfaction in the exercise of individuality, but too little to seek it anywhere but in commanding others. He loved himself too little to be anything but an egoist; and what his followers took to be a genuine concern for their salvation was in fact nothing more than the vanity of the almost selfless. No doubt the 'masses' in modern Europe have had other leaders than this cunning frustrate who has led always by flattery and whose only concern is the exercise of power; but they have had none more appropriate – for he only has never prompted them to be critical of their impulses. Indeed, the 'anti-individual' and his leader were the counterparts of a single moral situation; they relieved one another's frustrations and supplied one another's wants. Nevertheless, it was an uneasy partnership: moved by impulses rather than by desires, the 'mass man' has been submissive but not loyal to his leaders: even the exiguous individuality of the leader has easily aroused his suspicion. And the leader's greed for power has disposed him to raise hopes in his followers which he has never been able to satisfy.

Of all the manners in which the 'anti-individual' has imposed himself upon Western Europe two have been pre-eminent. He has generated a morality designed to displace the current morality of individuality; and he has evoked an understanding of the proper office of government and manners of governing appropriate to his character.

The emergence of the morality of the 'anti-individual', a morality, namely, not of 'liberty' and 'self-determination', but of 'equality' and 'solidarity' is, of course, difficult to discern; but it is already clearly visible in the seventeenth century. The obscurity of its beginnings is due in part to the fact that its vocabulary was at first that of the morality of the defunct communal order; and there can be little doubt that it derived strength and plausibility from its deceptive affinity to that morality. But it was, in fact, a new morality, generated in opposition to the hegemony of individuality and calling for the establishment of a new condition of human circumstance reflecting the aspirations of the 'anti-individual'.

The nucleus of this morality was the concept of a substantive condition of human circumstance represented as the 'common' or 'public' good, which was understood, not to be composed of the various goods that might be sought by individuals on their own account, but to be an independent entity. 'Self-love', which was recognized in the morality of individuality as a legitimate spring of human activity, the morality of the 'anti-individual' pronounced to be evil. But it was to be replaced, not by the love of 'others', or by 'charity' or by 'benevolence' (which would have entailed a relapse into the vocabulary of individuality), but by the love of 'the community'.

Round this nucleus revolved a constellation of appropriate subordinate beliefs. From the beginning, the designers of this morality identified private property with individuality, and consequently connected its abolition with the condition of human circumstance appropriate to the 'mass man'. And further, it was appropriate that the morality of the 'anti-individual' should be radically equalitarian: how should the 'mass man', whose sole distinction was his resemblance to his fellows and whose salvation lay in the recognition of others as merely replicas of himself, approve of any divergence from an exact uniformity? All must be equal and anonymous units in a 'community'. And, in the generation of this morality, the character of this 'unit' was tirelessly explored. He was understood as a 'man' *per se*, as a 'comrade', as a 'citizen'. But the most acute diagnosis, that of Proudhon, recognized him as a 'debtor'; for in this notion what was asserted was not only the absence of distinction between the units who composed the 'community' (all are alike

'debtors'), but also a debt owed, not to 'others' but to the 'community' itself: at birth he enters into an inheritance which he had played no part in accumulating, and whatever the magnitude of his subsequent contribution, it never equals what he has enjoyed: he dies necessarily insolvent.

This morality of the 'anti-individual', the morality of a *solidarité commune*, began to be constructed in the sixteenth century. Its designers were mostly visionaries, dimly aware of their purposes, and lacking a large audience. But a momentous change occurred when the 'anti-individual' recognized himself as the 'mass man', and perceived the power that his numerical superiority gave him. The recognition that the morality of the 'anti-individual' was, in the first place, the morality not of a sect of aspirants, but of a large ready-made class in society (the class, not of the 'poor', but of those who by circumstance or by occupation had been denied the experience of individuality), and that in the interests of this class it must be imposed upon all mankind, appears unmistakably first in the writings of Marx and Engels.

Before the end of the nineteenth century, then, a morality of 'anti-individualism' had been generated in response to the aspirations of the 'mass man'. It was, in many respects, a rickety construction: it never achieved a design comparable to that which Hobbes or Kant or Hegel gave the morality of individuality; and it has never been able to resist relapse into the inappropriate concepts of individuality. Nevertheless it throws back a tolerably clear reflection of the 'mass man', who by this means became more thoroughly acquainted with himself. But we are not concerned with its merits or defects, we are concerned only to notice it as evidence of the power with which the 'mass man' has imposed himself on modern Europe over a period of about four centuries. 'Anti-individuality', long before the nineteenth century, had established itself as one of the major dispositions of the modern European moral character. And this disposition was evident enough for it to be recognized unequivocally by Sorel, and to be identified by writers such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Burckhardt as the image of a new barbarism.

From the beginning (in the sixteenth century) those who exerted themselves on behalf of the 'anti-individual' perceived that his

counterpart, a 'community' reflecting his aspirations, entailed a 'government' active in a certain manner. To govern was understood to be the exercise of power in order to impose and maintain the substantive condition of human circumstance identified as 'the public good'; to be governed was, for the 'anti-individual', to have made for him the choices he was unable to make for himself. Thus, 'government' was cast for the rôle of architect and custodian, not of 'public order' in an 'association' of individuals pursuing their own activities, but of 'the public good' of a 'community'. The ruler was recognized to be, not the referee of the collisions of individuals, but the moral leader and managing director of 'the community'. And this understanding of government has been tirelessly explored over a period of four and a half centuries, from Thomas More's *Utopia* to the Fabian Society, from Campanella to Lenin. But the leaders who served the 'mass man' were not merely theorists concerned to make his character intelligible in a moral doctrine and in an understanding of the office of government; they were also practical men who revealed to him his power and the manner in which the institutions of modern democratic government might be appropriated to his aspirations. And if we call the manner of government that had been generated by the aspirations of individuality 'parliamentary government', we may call the modification of it under the impact of the 'mass man', 'popular government'. But it is important to understand that these are two wholly different manners of government.

The emergent individual in the sixteenth century had sought new rights, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century the rights appropriate to his character had, in England and elsewhere, been largely established. The 'anti-individual' observed these rights, and he was persuaded that his circumstances (chiefly his poverty) had hitherto prevented him from sharing them. Hence the new rights called for on his behalf were, in the first place, understood as the means by which he might come to participate in the rights won and enjoyed by those he thought of as his better placed fellows. But this was a great illusion; first, because in fact he had these rights, and secondly because he had no use for them. For the disposition of the 'mass man' was not to become an individual, and the enter-

prise of his leaders was not to urge him in this direction. And what, in fact, prevented him enjoying the rights of individuality (which were as available to him as to anyone else) was not his 'circumstances' but his character – his 'anti-individuality'. The rights of individuality were necessarily such that the 'mass man' could have no use for them. And so, in the end, it turned out: what he came to demand were rights of an entirely different *kind*, and of a kind which entailed the abolition of the rights appropriate to individuality. He required the right to enjoy a substantive condition of human circumstance in which he would not be asked to make choices for himself. He had no use for the right to 'pursue happiness' – that could only be a burden to him: he needed the right to 'enjoy happiness'. And looking into his own character he identified this with Security – but again, not security against arbitrary interference in the exercise of his preferences, but Security against having to make choices for himself and against to meet the vicissitudes of life from his own resources. In short, the right he claimed, the right appropriate to his character, was the right to live in a social protectorate which relieved him from the burden of 'self-determination'.

But this condition of human circumstances was seen to be impossible unless it were imposed upon all alike. So long as 'others' were permitted to make choices for themselves, not only would his anxiety at not being able to do so himself remain to convict him of his inadequacy and threaten his emotional security, but also the social protectorate which he recognized as his counterpart would itself be disrupted. The Security he needed entailed a genuine equality of circumstances imposed upon all. The condition he sought was one in which he would meet in others only a replica of himself: what he was, everybody must become.

He claimed this condition as a 'right', and consequently he sought a government disposed to give it to him and one endowed with the power necessary to impose upon all activities the substantive pattern of activity called 'the public good'. 'Popular government' is, precisely, a modification of 'parliamentary government' designed to accomplish this purpose. And if this reading is correct, 'popular government' is no more intimated in 'parliamentary government' than the rights appropriate to the 'anti-individual' are intimated in the rights appro-

priate to individuality: they are not complementary but directly opposed to one another. Nevertheless, what I have called 'popular government' is not a concrete manner of government established and practised; it is a disposition to impose certain modifications upon 'parliamentary government' in order to convert it into a manner of government appropriate to the aspirations of the 'mass man'.

This disposition has displayed itself in specific enterprises, and in less specific habits and manners in respect of government. The first great enterprise was the establishment of universal adult suffrage. The power of the 'mass man' lay in his numbers, and this power could be brought to bear upon government by means of 'the vote'. Secondly, a change in the character of the parliamentary representative was called for: he must be not an individual, but a *mandataire* charged with the task of imposing the substantive condition of human circumstances required by the 'mass man'. 'Parliament' must become a 'work-shop', not a debating assembly. Neither of these changes was intimated in 'parliamentary government'; both, in so far as they have been achieved, have entailed an assembly of a new character. Their immediate effect has been twofold: first, to confirm the authority of mere numbers (an authority alien to the practice of 'parliamentary government'); and secondly, to give governments immensely increased power.

But the institutions of 'parliamentary government' proved to have only a limited eligibility for conversion into institutions appropriate to serve the aspirations of the 'mass man'. And an assembly of instructed delegates was seen to be vulnerable to a much more appropriate contrivance – the *plébiscite*. Just as it lay in the character of the 'mass man' to see everyman as a 'public official', an agent of 'the public good', and to see his representatives not as individuals but instructed delegates, so he saw every voter as the direct participant in the activity of governing: and the means of this was the *plébiscite*. An assembly elected on a universal adult suffrage, composed of instructed delegates and flanked by the device of the *plébiscite* was, then, the counterpart of the 'mass man'. They gave him exactly what he wanted: the illusion without the reality of choice; choice without the burden of having to choose. For, with universal suffrage have appeared the massive political parties of the modern world,

composed not of individuals but of 'anti-individuals'. And both the instructed delegate and the *plébiscite* are devices for avoiding the necessity for making choices. The 'mandate' from the beginning was an illusion. The 'mass man', as we have seen, is a creature of impulses, not desires; he is utterly unable to draw up instructions for his representative to follow. What in fact has happened, whenever the disposition of 'popular government' has imposed itself, is that the prospective representative has drawn up his own mandate and then, by a familiar trick of ventriloquism, has put it into the mouth of his electors: as an instructed delegate he is not an individual, and as a 'leader' he relieves his followers of the need to make choices for themselves. And similarly, the *plébiscite* is not a method by which the 'mass man' imposes his choices upon his rulers; it is a method of generating a government with unlimited authority to make choices on his behalf. In the *plébiscite* the 'mass man' achieved final release from the burden of individuality: he was told emphatically what to choose.

Thus, in these and other constitutional devices, and in less formal habits of political conduct, was generated a new art of politics: the art, not of 'ruling' (that is, of seeking the most practicable adjustments for the collisions of 'individuals'), nor even of maintaining the support of a majority of individuals in a 'parliamentary' assembly, but of knowing what offer will collect most votes and making it in such a manner that it appears to come from 'the people'; the art, in short, of 'leading' in the modern idiom. Moreover, it is known in advance what offer will collect the most votes: the character of the 'mass man' is such that he will be moved only by the offer of release from the burden of making choices for himself, the offer of 'salvation'. And anyone who makes this offer may confidently demand unlimited power: it will be given him.

The 'mass man', as I understand him, then, is specified by his character, not by his numbers. He is distinguished by so exiguous an individuality that when it meets a powerful experience of individuality it revolts into 'anti-individuality'. He has generated for himself an appropriate morality, an appropriate understanding of the office of government, and appropriate modifications of 'parliamentary government'. He is not necessarily 'poor', nor is he envious only of

'riches'; he is not necessarily 'ignorant', often he is a member of the so-called *intelligentsia*; he belongs to a class which corresponds exactly with no other class. He is specified primarily by a moral, not an intellectual, inadequacy. He wants 'salvation'; and in the end will be satisfied only with release from the burden of having to make choices for himself. He is dangerous, not on account of his opinions or desires, for he has none: but on account of his submissiveness. His disposition is to endow government with power and authority such as it has never before enjoyed: he is utterly unable to distinguish a 'ruler' from a 'leader'. In short, the disposition to be an 'anti-individual' is one to which every European man has a propensity; the 'mass man' is merely one in whom this propensity is dominant.

IV

Of the many conclusions which follow from this reading of the situation the most important is to dispose of the most insidious of our current political delusions. It has been said, and it is commonly believed, that the event of supreme importance in modern European history is 'the accession of the masses to complete social power'. But that no such event has taken place is evident when we consider what it would entail. If it is true (as I have contended) that modern Europe enjoys two opposed moralities (that of individuality and that of the 'anti-individual'), that it enjoys two opposed understandings of the office of government, and two corresponding interpretations of the current institutions of government, then, for the 'mass man' to have won for himself a position of undisputed sovereignty would entail the complete suppression of what, in any reading, must be considered the strongest of our moral and political dispositions and the survival of the weakest. A world in which the 'mass man' exercised 'complete social power' would be a world in which the activity of governing was understood *solely* as the imposition of a single substantive condition of human circumstance, a world in which 'popular government' had altogether displaced 'parliamentary government', a world in which the 'civil' rights of individuality had been abrogated by the 'social' rights of anti-individuality – and there is no evidence that we live in such a world. Certainly the 'mass man'

has emerged and has signified his emergence in an appropriate morality and an appropriate understanding of the office of government. He has sought to transform the world into a replica of himself, and he has not been entirely unsuccessful. He has sought to enjoy what he could not create for himself, and nothing he has appropriated remains unchanged. Nevertheless, he remains an unmistakably derivative character, an emanation of the pursuit of individuality, helpless, parasitic and able to survive only in opposition to individuality. Only in the most favourable circumstances, and then only by segregating him from all alien influences, have his leaders been able to suppress in him an unquenched propensity to desert at the call of individuality. He has imposed himself emphatically only where the relics of a morality of communal ties survived to make plausible his moral and political impulses. Elsewhere, the modifications he has provoked in political manners and moral beliefs have been extensive, but the notion that they have effaced the morality of individuality and 'parliamentary government' is without foundation. He loves himself too little to be able to dispose effectively of the only power he has, namely, his numerical superiority. He lacks passion rather than reason. He has had a past in which he was taught to admire himself and his antipathies; he has a present in which he is often the object of the ill-concealed contempt of his 'leaders'; but the heroic future forecast him is discrepant with his own character. He is no hero.

On the other hand, if we judge the world as we find it (which includes, of course, the emergence of the 'mass man') the event of supreme and seminal importance in modern European history remains the emergence of the human individual in his modern idiom. The pursuit of individuality has evoked a moral disposition, an understanding of the office of government and manners of governing, a multiplicity of activity and opinion and a notion of 'happiness', which have impressed themselves indelibly upon European civilization. The onslaught of the 'mass man' has shaken but not destroyed the moral prestige of individuality; even the 'anti-individual', whose salvation lies in escape, has not been able to escape it. The desire of 'the masses' to enjoy the products of individuality has modified their destructive urge. And the antipathy of the 'mass

MICHAEL OAKESHOTT

man' to the 'happiness' of 'self-determination' easily dissolves into self-pity. At all important points the individual still appears as the substance and the 'anti-individual' only as the shadow.